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Mellen Chamberlain

A HISTORICAL REVIEW.

BY

HON. MELLEN CHAMBERLAIN, LL.D.



THE HISTORY OF THE PEOPLE OF THE UNITED STATES.

A REVIEW OF McMASTER'S HISTORY.

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MCMASTER'S HISTORY OF THE PEOPLE OF THE UNITED STATES.

MR. JOHN BACH MCMASTER has undertaken to write the history of the people of the United States, from the Revolution to the Civil War, in five volumes, two of which, bringing the narrative down into Jefferson's administration, have already appeared. The first, published in 1883, was favorably received by critics as well as by the public; and the second, which has recently appeared, shows no loss of vigor in its execution or of interest in its materials. A new history of the United States should be its own excuse for being. Mr. McMaster's work is undoubtedly a positive contribution to history, and by its excellences no less than by its defects will provoke criticism. This should be so; for one of the promises of a better literature is our discontent with what we already have.

It need not be said of the first edition of a work dealing with a great variety of facts, that errors have crept into it, or that some things essential to completeness have been overlooked, or that some unwarranted conclusions have been drawn from authorities cited in their support. Such errors and defects are inevitable.

Mr. McMaster possesses manifest qualifications for writing history. To say of a historian that he is honest, that he collects his materials industriously and allows them to stand for what they are worth, without foisting upon them a partisan or sectarian theory, ought to sound as strange as when said of a judicial magistrate. But it does not; and when such things can be truly said of a writer of history, it is very high praise. Mr. McMaster's industry is marvelous, even to those familiar with similar researches. He overlooks some things, but he conceals nothing. We may conjecture the direction of his sympathies in respect to the great political parties which were forming during the early stages of his history, but there is no lack of candor in dealing with them, and he dares to look even Washington in the face.

This has not always been so. Charles Thomson, the patriotic secretary of the old Congress, wrote its history, which he intended to publish; but his courage failed at the pinch, and he burnt it. We might guess his reasons, even if he had not given them, when we read the "Diary of John Adams."

Mr. McMaster entitles his work "A History of the People of the United States," and thereby indicates an intention which is more fully avowed in his introductory chapter. He says that in the course of his narrative "much, indeed, must be written of wars, conspiracies, and rebellions; of presidents, of congresses, of embassies, of treaties, of the ambition of political leaders in the senate-house, and of the rise of great parties in the nation. Yet the history of the people shall be the chief theme."

He makes no claim to originality in drawing this distinction between the history of the people and of the nation to which they belong. In 1879 John Richard Green, whose early death was a loss to letters, published a "Short History of the English People," in which he proposed "to pass lightly and briefly over the details of foreign wars and diplomacies, the personal adventures of kings and nobles, the pomp of courts, or the intrigues of favorites, and to dwell at length on the incidents of that constitutional and social advance in which we read the history of the nation itself." To Mr. Green's authority for this theory of what makes the history of the English people Mr. McMaster has now added his own for a similar theory of the history of the people of the United States. But Mr. Green's ideas upon English history appear to be questioned by high authority, presently to be adverted to; and it is proposed to offer in this paper some special considerations which make them less applicable to the history of the United States.

The success of Mr. Green's history was immediate and brilliant, — only equaled by that of Macaulay's historical essays and of his "History of England." But this success was due, in part at least, to Mr. Green's rare historical insight, to his condensation and artistic grouping of materials, and to his singularly pure and attractive style. His theory also gained adherents as a protest against that class of historical compositions in which wars, the doings of courts and parliaments, and foreign relations were treated as the staple of history, while the progress of literature, of science, of art, and of manners was relegated in brief summaries — as notably by Hume — to the end of a chapter. Hildreth, whose history is one of the best, rigorously excluded from it everything like a theory of politics, and, to make amends, published an ex-

cellent one as a separate treatise, and cynically commended it to the attention of "such critics as have complained that his history of the United States had no 'philosophy' in it."

But Mr. Green's scheme of history seems to be challenged by Professor Seeley in his "Expansion of England," who regards the progress of a people in literature, art, and manners as properly belonging to the history of the "general progress that the human race everywhere alike, and therefore also in England, may chance to be making;" and that such matters would be more fittingly treated, as they have been, in the history of literature in England.

On the other hand, he considers that "history has to do with the state; that it investigates the growth and changes of a certain corporate society, which acts through certain functionaries and certain assemblies. By the nature of the state every person who lives in a certain territory is usually a member of it, but history is not concerned with individuals, except in their capacity of members of a state. That a man in England makes a scientific discovery or paints a picture is not in itself an event in the history of England. Individuals are important in history in proportion not to their intrinsic merit, but to their relation to the state. Socrates was a much greater man than Cleon, but Cleon has a much greater space in Thucydides. Newton was a greater man than Harley, yet it is Harley, not Newton, who fixes the attention of the historian of the reign of Queen Anne."

These extracts indicate that Mr. Green and Professor Seeley were not in accord respecting the scope and proper limitations of the history of England; and yet neither could push his views to extremes. Although Mr. Green passes lightly and briefly over foreign wars and the intrigues of courts, they form no inconsiderable part of his history when comprised in a single volume, and a still greater part when, in a new edition, that volume is expanded into four. And, on the other hand, Professor Seeley would often find himself in the presence of unorganized forces, not belonging to the state and having no direct relation to it, yet visibly affecting it, and therefore to be taken into historical account.

But even if Mr. Green's theory of the history of England is correct, it does not follow that it is applicable to that of the United States; for there is a wide difference between the two nations, and an appreciation of this difference is vital to the verity of our history. Louis XIV., without exaggeration, might exclaim, "I am the state;" and there was a time in England when the

phrase, "King, Lords, and Commons" expressed the existence of a deep gulf between these factors in the constitution and the electors of the Commons. They constituted only one sixth of the people, and did not include the citizens of such great towns as Liverpool, Manchester, and Birmingham. And there was a still deeper gulf between these electors and the great body of unrepresented people. Nor was there on one side of this chasm knowledge, wisdom, and virtue, and on the other weakness, ignorance, and vice. For neither literature nor religion, save so far as it was political, had recognized relations to the state, or direct influence in the management of its affairs.

But Mr. McMaster finds no such state of affairs here. From the day when Englishmen first appeared on this continent in organized societies, the people and the state have been interchangeable terms; and everything included in one is also included in the other. Nor will the history of either permit the exclusion of wars, conspiracies, or rebellions, or the according to them less than their just prominence among those causes which have made the United States what they are to-day. What things constitute the proper subject of history, and their relative importance in its narrative, is determinable only by the completeness and verity of history.

The history of the United States is without pageantry or splendor, but it is unique; and upon a due appreciation of its character, and a conformity to the requirements of a truthful setting forth of it, will chiefly depend its usefulness not only to us, but to foreign nations, which seem to be sensible to the value of the facts which lie behind it, if not to the felicity of their literary expression.

This history may be briefly outlined. The English colonies in North America, with some political and religious diversities, began their organic life on this soil under substantially the same conditions, which continued down to the Revolution. Whether they were crown-provinces, or had obtained charters from the king, or from the proprietaries, or had organized under their patents, they had moulded these various powers into constitutions of government which, in 1775, gave a higher sanction to armed resistance to royal authority than any wrongs they had suffered, or any wrongs they feared. A strange, unique history! Thirteen incorporated land companies — for such was their legal character — developed, with only a nominal adherence to their acts of incorporation, into thirteen independent, constitutional governments. This is what they had accomplished at the close of the Revolution:

not union, then; or nationality. These, in all but the name, belong to our own day; and, like the first, are the results of civil war.

When we look at these colonies as organized societies we find, as we find nowhere else, that the people and the state were identical. The state was the people "as a mode of action." In other lands a king, or a king's mistress, or a cabal, made wars, invaded personal and public rights, and ruined finances; but if an American colony was turbulent or disobedient, it was the turbulence and disobedience of the people; if wars were waged, or embassies dispatched, it was by their order; if schools, colleges, or churches were set up and maintained, it was because the people willed it; and if, at one time, the covenant was held in its rigor, and at a later time, in a modified form, it was the voice of the people speaking through the General Court, or a synod, that so ordained.

Contrast this state of affairs with what prevailed even in England, in which alone, of the European nations, popular ideas had made any considerable progress. On the side of the political organization called the state were arrayed many prerogatives no longer based on reason: the power of making war and peace irrespective of popular sentiment, and all those agencies which were clothed with the insignia of nationality. Apart from and over against the state, but having certain relations to it, were the people, among whom might be found art, science, literature, and all those social and moral forces which do not depend upon the state for their efficiency. Where such distinctions exist between the people and their government, a history of the English people may be something apart from the history of England; but the essential correlation of the people and the government of the United States — in fact, their identity — makes the history of the people, so far as it implies a distinction, a political and historical solecism.

Apparently Mr. McMaster intended such a distinction, to judge by the title of his history, and from the fact that in the history itself, he has passed over in silence, or relegated to a subordinate place, those matters which do not have a direct relation to what is called the progress of society, using the term comprehensively.

Mr. McMaster's history opens in the midst of a sad, shameful period of our national life, if we accept the pictures he paints of it; and that they are drawn with a general fidelity to truth there can be no doubt. But it is equally true that the people suffer

undeservedly in reputation by this division of their history in the middle of an important epoch, the whole of which is essential to a right understanding of its parts. The treaty of peace in 1783, with which Mr. McMaster's history opens, is an apparent, instead of a real, landmark in our history. Essentially, it was a political recognition of a fact accomplished by the capitulation of Cornwallis nearly two years before. By beginning his history at the time which he has selected, the people are not only denied the period of their glory, but also of the presentation of those circumstances which extenuate their shame. On the 19th of April, 1775, the war for independence opened with spirit, and it was carried on with courage and self-devotion. For undisciplined soldiers, the troops generally fought fairly well; and the officers were patriotic, if not particularly well educated for the profession of arms. Congress and the colonial assemblies exerted themselves with vigor, and the people did not lag behind. High-water mark of patriotism was reached in those efforts, public and private, which were crowned by the surrender of Burgoyne's army in October, 1777. With this event the people hoped the war would end; but it turned out otherwise, and the disasters at Brandywine, in September, and at Germantown, in October of the same year, fell with disheartening effect upon the country. This soon began to appear. Enlistments gradually fell off from 46,901 in 1776 to 13,832 in 1781, the last year of the war; and the actual payments on military account, during the same period, dwindled from \$21,000,000 to \$2,000,000.¹ The people were becoming tired of the war, with its merciless drain upon their resources; and when the French army, with its ample military chest, took the field, there was danger lest the further prosecution of the contest would depend upon French men and French money. Jobbery and self-seeking were as rife as in the last years of the late civil war. The unpaid soldiers were mutinous, and traitors near Washington's person corruptly revealed his plans to Clinton almost as soon as they were formed. Congress was torn with dissensions, and its proceedings were marked by incapacity and indecision. And the colonial assemblies were no better. In the dire extremity of the army, — its ranks depleted, its military chest empty, the soldiers destitute of food and clothing, — requisitions were treated with indifference and almost contempt. This was

¹ These and similar figures in this paper express facts only in a general way, and for any more exact purpose are to be received with caution, although found in respectable authorities.

the beginning of a state of affairs which continued some years after the time at which Mr. McMaster opens his history of the people. Few more humiliating stories than those he relates can be found in the annals of the Anglo-Saxon race: the treatment of the old soldiers; the barbarities practiced on the refugee loyalists; the continual disregard of Congressional requisitions for the support of the government; the Newburgh Address; the violent resistance to the administration of justice; the hostile legislation between the colonies; the proposed issue of irredeemable paper-money for the purpose, openly avowed, of defrauding creditors. These, and other similar acts, threatened political and social anarchy. Nevertheless, the people did not fall into anarchy. On the contrary, government performed its functions, and steadily moved forward in the development of more complete and efficient forms. And if the history of the people in its entirety from 1774 to 1789 be taken into account, as in fairness it ought to be, though sorely tried, they were patient, courageous, prodigal of themselves and of their money, and worthy of the highest encomiums. Their history is the history of a period. Men who signed the Address to the King in 1774 also signed the Constitution of the United States in 1787; and during this time—less than half that assigned to a generation—what labors and sufferings did they not endure, what depths of humiliation did they not sound, what heights of glory did they not tread,—these men, less than three millions, who, in resistance to parliamentary taxation, put nearly three hundred thousand troops into the field, raised and paid out from the general treasury above a hundred millions of dollars, proclaimed and secured independence, changed their colonial governments without passing through a period of anarchy, quelled intestine commotions, entered into union, and established a national government which secured their prosperity and happiness! What people, in a time so brief, ever achieved so much? Nevertheless, they were very human. Sometimes they faltered; sometimes they lost heart, and even their heads; but they recovered both in season to prevent irretrievable disaster, and finally accomplished their great purpose. Now anything less than this history in its entirety, however faithful it may be in details, is injurious to their just fame, and loses its value for example or warning. Their mistakes, weaknesses and vacillation undoubtedly form a part of their history; and so do those great achievements and characteristics by which they finally triumphed. The remnant that were wise, constant, and virtuous were the people,—the

Washingtons, Greenes, and Sumters, not the Arnolds, Conways, and Parsonsens. In determining the character of the people of the Revolution, as a whole, it is not a question of majority. The men are to be weighed, not counted. On the side where the ultimate *force majeure* was found, there the people were to be found, — whether in the majority or in the minority no matter; and if the outcome of their endeavor was success, then were the people intelligent and wise; and if it was beneficent, then were they virtuous. The period from 1774 to 1789 was a period of rebellion, revolution, and reconstruction. But it will never be understood so long as it is regarded as an exceptional epoch in our history; for from the first day that organized English colonies were planted on American soil they began to rebel, to make revolutions, and to form constitutions. This they continued to do in clear political sequence, with scarcely a break, down to the day when they found themselves under a stable government of their own. This is true of all the colonies, and the essential political history of each is the history of every other. The history of their governments and of their peoples is one and inseparable; and their several peoples were one people, — an organism with functions of scarcely distinguishable honor or usefulness. There were no rich, no poor; no high, no low; no wise, no ignorant; no virtuous, no vicious, in the European sense of these terms.

It is doubtful, therefore, whether this history can be adequately told in a series of monographs, or if the history of the people be severed from that of the political constitutions which expressed the popular sentiment. But if this is attempted, the series certainly should include one on the people themselves; for few subjects are more interesting or instructive than the changes in the character of the people of the United States between the landing at Jamestown and the period which closes Mr. McMaster's second volume. For such a history we could well spare, or pass lightly over, some other matters. History ought to be made interesting, if verity in the general effect can be preserved. But many entertaining subjects are of secondary importance. We need not be told — certainly not with much detail — that in a new country, remote from great centres of wealth and civilization, roads were bad, bridges few or none, hotels execrable, books rare, and newspapers lacking their modern features. Such a condition of things marks only a stage of material progress, — not of civilization. Refined and cultivated communities have often found themselves surrounded by similar circumstances in the past, and so will others

in the future. The essential character of the people is vastly more important.

At the time Mr. McMaster's history opens, Englishmen and their descendants, with slight admixture of other blood, had lived for a hundred and fifty years on this soil, under climate and influences widely differing from those to which their race for a thousand years had been accustomed. What changes had these new conditions produced in the physical, intellectual, or moral character of these Anglo-Americans? On its native soil the race had wrought great things and acquired a great character. Less by military genius than by courage and indomitable pluck, it had waged successful wars. Rapacious in conquest and greedy of the commercial results of colonization, yet it was the most equitable of nations in dealing with its dependencies, save Ireland, and most benign in forming governments for them. Nor was this greatness of the past alone; for recently, under the inspiration of Pitt's genius, its spirit, bursting insular bounds, had shone with unsurpassed splendor. There was no continent and no clime that did not witness it. In Europe, on the field of Rosbach, it had upheld the hands of Frederick the Great, as he repelled the last assault on Continental Protestantism. At Plassy it had opened a new empire in India. On the sea it had humbled the power of Spain; and on the Plains of Abraham it had destroyed the empire of France in America. No people in modern times had reached such heights of national glory. Nor were their moral victories less splendid. The nameless horrors of prisons were abolished; the slave-trade was destroyed; the penal code mitigated; a reform bill passed, and moral instruction carried to the cottages of the lowly, — achievements which conferred lustre on such names as Howard, Clarkson, Wilberforce, Burke, Romilly, and Hannah More.

With such affiliations, with such inheritances, with such stimulating examples in the elder branch of the race, how did the younger branch bear itself in its western home? From their first coming to these shores to the fall of the French empire in America their work, though difficult, had been simple: to subdue a wilderness and its savage inhabitants; to develop self-government under the conditions imposed by their charters; and to promote religion, education, and social progress. But after the fall of the French power a new, complicated, and difficult problem confronted them: to subvert the disastrous commercial policy of the empire, peaceably if possible, but to subvert it at all hazards; to disrupt the empire itself when the necessity became inevitable; to declare

and maintain independence ; to change colonial governments into independent states, without intervening anarchy ; to form and establish union under a frame of government which should recognize the autonomy of those states, while it embraced them all under a federal jurisdiction.

No people had ever undertaken a more difficult work, or accomplished it more successfully. England, in the days of Cromwell, attempted a permanent change of her government, and failed conspicuously. Later, France also failed in a similar endeavor prosecuted by methods at which mankind stood aghast.

But the American people have succeeded where those of England and of France miscarried. Chance and circumstances doubtless had something to do with this difference in results, but it was mainly owing to difference in character. The Anglo-American had acquired an element of character which did not belong to his British progenitor. Whatever he may have lost, he had gained the power of organization ; and without this power he must have failed. This requires explanation. To the typical Englishman, the unit of force was the individual man ; to the typical American, it was an organization. The force which reformed English prisons was John Howard ; the force which reformed American prisons was the Prison Discipline Society. And something like this difference in modes of action has distinguished the two branches of the race in those great movements which constitute the glory and the hope of the age.

This change in methods of action began in necessity. The first comers recognized it at once, and, with that practical sagacity which has always characterized them, they proceeded to organize themselves into a state-militant as a protection against an insidious foe ; into a church-militant to deal summarily with intruding heretics ; into town governments for the conduct of communal affairs ; into school districts to carry education to every man's door ; into watch-and-ward divisions for protection against fire and midnight marauders. And these people have lived and breathed and had their being in organizations ever since, and with manifest advantages, especially at the outset ; for not only was every man utilized, leaving none superfluous or idle, but utilized for every conceivable exigency of the state, of which he became a part in a manner before unknown. And the value of this pervasive system of organization was even more manifest, when, in the fullness of time, barely two millions and a half of people were arrayed in resistance to the most powerful empire of the

world. Never did any race exhibit such power of organization, or put it to such efficient use, as did the colonists during the American Revolution. Town governments, committees of safety, committees of correspondence, inter-colonial associations, extemporized provincial congresses, and even organized mobs kept well in hand by Samuel Adams and Isaac Sears to strike in exigencies where legal methods were inefficient, not only successfully resisted the power of Great Britain, but subverted the royal provincial governments, without violence, by provincial congresses which took their place *ad interim*.

We can seldom trace a national habit to its origin, but in this instance we may. It was due to their colonial charters; for the acceptance of a charter was in itself an act of organization, and the corporate existence in conformity to its provisions compelled the immediate organization of all those institutions, or their equivalents, such as legislatures, courts, towns, military companies, and the like, which on English soil, in the course of ages, had grown up without organization. A new necessity formed a new habit. And the habit once formed, the people organized themselves in all possible relations to the colonial state, and finally to all religious, social, and moral enterprises. Happily for them, also, the acceptance of charters changed their natural relations to the parent country into organic political relations to the Crown which engaged the power of the state for their protection from domestic anarchy and foreign foes. The lack of this advantage, which can hardly be overestimated, is manifest in the unhappy condition of those colonies — of which Rhode Island is an example — which were without charters, or acquired them too late. This was not fully understood by either party at the time; but we now see that when Charles I. signed a colonial charter, he signed an instrument which, in the hands of the colonists, became an incipient declaration of independence to disturb all his successors; and the fact that the English colonies were lands held of the crown, or were corporations within the realm for extra-territorial purposes, and as such created certain reciprocal rights and duties, is the master-key which unlocks their political history from Jamestown to Lexington.

This acquired faculty of organization still abides, and is used for the accomplishment of every conceivable purpose, and perhaps threatens to impair the force of individual action in great enterprises. But it ought not to be overlooked in the history of the people of the United States; for to it the people owe their independence. It is their greatest contribution to the science of prac-

tical politics, and its use is becoming common and efficient in other lands.¹

But it is in the state that our history mainly centres, and there it must be sought; for by the government have been accomplished those ends which most powerfully effected not only the material prosperity of the people, but also their national character. It was by a foreign treaty that the people gained a recognized position among the nations; by the same treaty their rights in the fisheries were restored, and thus was formed a nursery of hardy seamen who, when free play was given to their spirit, challenged England's assumed sovereignty of the seas; and it was the same treaty which opened the Mississippi to the turbulent commerce which poured down from its tributaries. The ordinance of 1787 — which Mr. McMaster has passed over without endeavoring to unravel its intricate history, and with only slight recognition of its character — excluded slavery from the Northwest, and made it the home of freemen who now have grown to prosperous millions. It was by treaty that Louisiana was purchased in 1803, including territory which more than doubled the area of the Union, and saved to Anglo-American laws, customs, and manners the vast regions beyond the great river. It was through the Assumption Act and the Funding System that Hamilton "touched the dead corpse of the Public Credit, and it sprung upon its feet," — acts whose moral significance is found in the fact that the public credit has ever since been without stain, that specie payment was resumed, and that justice was done to the veterans of the civil war.

Such are some of the themes — "of congresses, of embassies, of treaties" — which enter into the real history of the people of the United States, and constitute its chief value for the citizen as

¹ De Tocqueville opens the XIIth chapter of his first volume of *Democracy in America* with these words: "In no country in the world has the principle of association been more successfully used, or applied to a greater multitude of objects, than in America;" but he states the fact as he found it when he wrote, without tracing its historical origin. In the Vth chapter of his second volume, he recurs to the subject and asks, "Is this the result of accident? or is there in reality any necessary connection between the principle of association and that of equality?" Apparently he thought there was. But association in America is a historical fact which antedates by sixty years the operation of politico-philosophical causes. The first act of social existence in the dominating colony of New England was an act of association which made necessary all successive steps in that direction. Equality was scarcely a genetic force in a close corporation of landholders into which the prime condition of entrance was membership in the established colonial church. Of the general correctness of De Tocqueville's view, however, there can be little doubt.

well as for the student. They ought not to be crowded into a corner!

On the other hand, it is noticeable that from the peace of 1783 to the close of Washington's administration such matters as are embraced in the phrase "the progress of society" were almost of necessity in abeyance. For during this period the States were perfecting the machinery of their several governments, and the general government was determining its own powers, and adjusting its relations to the States. The people were chiefly occupied "with wars, conspiracies, rebellions; with presidents, with congresses, with embassies, and with treaties," which Mr. McMaster regards as of secondary importance.

But though they were chiefly so concerned, nevertheless molecular action was going on which affected their moral and intellectual character; it was due, however, neither to the state nor to popular action, but to forces entirely overlooked by Mr. McMaster, or so treated by him as to afford no indication of their power. For when Francis Asbury, John Murray, Elhanan Winchester, and Joseph Priestley died, the people of the United States were something quite different from what they would have been had these Englishmen never lived and labored on American soil. Asbury's influence, doubtless, was the most widely and most powerfully felt; and it is, perhaps, no exaggeration to say that he saved the West and the Southwest to civilization. For as the hardy but illiterate people from the hills of Virginia and the Carolinas scaled the Alleghanies, and from their western slopes descended into the valley of the Mississippi, it was Asbury and the three thousand Methodist preachers ordained by him who met and organized them into religious societies, so that within twenty years from the peace of 1783 these trans-Alleghanian communities were nearly as well supplied with religious institutions as the older States from which they had emigrated.

The labors of Murray and Winchester, the apostles of Universalism, also, were too considerable to be passed silently by in the history of the people of the United States, and the same may be said of the rehabilitation of Episcopacy by Madison, Seabury, Parker, Bass, and White.

Of Priestley's scientific and political influence we are told something, but nothing of his theological opinions, which a little later convulsed New England churches, and gained adherents from whom came the greater part of our imaginative literature even to the present day.

No reasonable exception can be taken to Mr. McMaster's low estimate of colonial imaginative literature, and he doubtless places a just value — which is high — upon the theological speculations of those days, which for acuteness and depth were not surpassed by any similar work emanating from the British islands. But the historian should not undervalue the political pamphlets of Otis, Hutchinson, the Adamses, Jay, Dickinson, and Livingston, for they have not been surpassed either in the discussion of great principles or in their application to practical affairs. The legal erudition of those times, also, is almost phenomenal when it is considered that from a people without training in legal principles, and with a profound distrust of lawyers, there sprang almost at a bound, when needed, men such as Gridley, Prat, Adams, Parsons, Jay, Dulaney, Wythe, and Marshall, either of whom, with a little special training, would have filled with credit the place of Mansfield, of Camden, or of Eldon.

The causes of the literary poverty of men of such large and varied general ability opens up an interesting field of speculation, but not to be entered upon at this time.

It is easier to raise questions respecting the history of the people of the United States than it is to answer them. Nevertheless, such questions are legitimate. For example, Mr. McMaster tells us that "in the Southern States education was almost wholly neglected, but nowhere to such an extent as in South Carolina." And yet, from Virginia and the Carolinas emigrated to Kentucky, Tennessee, and Mississippi a race of men like Andrew Jackson, George Rogers Clarke, and John Sevier, who not only wrote good hands (as their early autograph letters, preserved in collections, show), but who seemed to be fairly educated for civil affairs, and able to carry forward, in their new homes, a civilization differing in some respects from that of the East, but in no respect inferior to that of the communities they left behind them. These were not the sons of wealthy planters, educated at Eton, Winchester, or Hackney, or even at William and Mary; or of parents able to provide for them private tutors. The educational history of these emigrants is an interesting subject for investigation.

The modification of the character of the descendants of Englishmen on this soil, already spoken of, was brought about mainly by their situation. But during the last quarter of the eighteenth century there had come into their life a new force, — faith in the power of ideas. Down to that time Anglo-Americans, like their progenitors, were men severely practical, and averse to general

propositions. Their faith in the power of creeds and dogmas, religious and political, was steadfast. They believed in heavy battalions and serried ranks, but with them faith in the power of ideas was not even a conception. Their legislation related to affairs, not to systems ; and the doctrinaire was not known within their borders. But for the last century it has been different, and this difference is due to Jefferson. Where Jefferson got his idealism is a mystery ; for though he has many disciples, he had no known master. It is usual to attribute it to the influence of French writers — Rousseau especially ; but the vitality and permanence of this element in his character suggest an original rather than an acquired force. About Jefferson as the head of a party, as an administrator, and even as a man, opinions may differ ; but there can be little doubt that he was the first statesman who had faith in the sufficiency of ideas not merely as tests of the validity of political institutions, but as a power to subvert arbitrary government, and overthrow errors however strongly entrenched in ancient wrong. In this respect perhaps he stands first among thinkers, and certainly is among the greatest of those who have profoundly and beneficently modified the character of an entire people. His influence seems destined to affect the thought of mankind.

De Tocqueville has noticed this change. “The Americans,” he says, “are much more addicted to the use of general ideas than the English, and entertain a much greater relish for them : this appears very singular at first, when it is remembered that the two nations have the same origin, that they lived for centuries under the same laws, and that they incessantly interchange their opinions and their manners. . . . They have no philosophical school of their own, . . . yet they have a philosophical method common to the whole people.” The way may have been prepared for this change, as he suggests, by their democratic habits, but Jefferson was the founder of the school of political idealists. He struck the keynote, first heard in his “Summary View,” in 1774, and with a louder strain sent it round the world in the great Declaration. If one would see the change produced by Jefferson, let him read the Declaration of Rights by the Congress of 1774, and then the Declaration of Independence of 1776. One is a specification as cold as an indictment to be tried by a petit jury ; the other, a trumpet call to the race and to the ages. It was the comprehensiveness of Jefferson’s immortal Declaration which made it powerful in one generation to sever the bands of an empire, and in an-

other to break the shackles of four millions of slaves, and in the present — but who shall forecast the future of Ireland, or limit the potency of Jefferson's words? To redress the balance between England and her colonies he invoked the power of ideas. He thus added to the armory of a struggling people a new weapon, — now the dynamics of nationalities, — restless, resistless, unsailable by fleets or armies.

This force, which Jefferson set in motion, sometimes took a direction which he did not contemplate, and of which he would not have approved. The real inspiration of the young statesmen who forced the war of 1812 was less the local cry of "free trade and sailors' rights" than an aspiration towards nationality, caught not from Jefferson, indeed, — for the father of State-rights was not a nationalist, — but for which they were indebted, nevertheless, to Jefferson's idealism: an aspiration to which Webster gave utterance at Bunker Hill in words never forgotten, "Our country, our whole country, and nothing but our country;" and again, even more effectively, in the Senate Chamber, in those other words, "the Union, one and inseparable," taken up by the people and realized after four years of civil war.

The advent of such a force into the life of a people is rare, and when apprehended in its full significance it is one of the most impressive events in their history; and its recognition is a test of historic insight. It is America's contribution to political philosophy; and if it be thought to belong to politics rather than to history, it is, nevertheless, an event inseparably connected with the history of the people of the United States, and is fast becoming a part of the history of the human race. As the race moves down through the ages, it has a life and progress which includes the life and progress of every nationality. Into this mighty stream come affluents which bear on their surface traces of the soil and vegetation of their sources, and these mark the differences between nations.

Mr. McMaster's book is a valuable contribution to our history, and will be the cause of work better than its own. His industrious collection of materials, and his effective arrangement and courageous presentation of them, cannot fail to stimulate other workers in the same field. But he does not always discriminate as to the value of authorities, and his history suffers somewhat in consequence. Observations in science, unless made under conditions which insure accuracy, are of little value; and this is beginning to be recognized in respect to history. No conclusions should be drawn from the unsupported testimony of such travelers as

Anbury or Brissot; and sectarian and party prejudices often render worthless the works of native historians.

With these observations we take leave of Mr. McMaster's history. Where we have received so much, and of so great value, it is ungracious to ask for more, or for something different; but our just claims upon Mr. McMaster are limited only by his ability. His series of historical monographs is accepted with gratitude; but if he has

“left half-told
The story”

which he is able to tell in full, — and certain vital signs leave little doubt on that point, — he must forgive us if we are not entirely satisfied with what he has already done.

Mellen Chamberlain.

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